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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Office of National Estimates

23 March 1956

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director

SUBJECT: Offshore Islands

1. The Board has been concerned over the possibility of Chinese Communist military action in the Taiwan Straits area, and has reviewed our most recent estimate bearing on this subject. In NIE 13-56 we estimated that:

While the Chinese Communists probably do not intend to attack Taiwan so long as the US maintains its commitments to the Nationalists, they will almost certainly conduct probing operations against the offshore islands. If the Chinese became convinced that the US would not assist in the defense of these islands with its own forces, they probably would attempt to seize them. Should Peiping's forces successfully occupy the Nationalist-held offshore islands without incurring US military retaliation, there would be an intensification of the campaign to obtain Taiwan.

We believe that this estimate is still valid. The Chinese Communists and the USSR probably believe that a major frontal attack on the main islands of the Quemoy or Matsu group

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would meet stiff resistance, might provoke US intervention, and would prejudice Peiping's peaceful pose elsewhere. We believe, however, that these considerations would not presently deter Peiping from military action against such lightly held Nationalist islands as the Wuchiu or Yinshan groups, or one of the smaller islands in the Matsus.

2. Therefore we consider that there is a better than even chance of attacks on some of the minor offshore islands during the favorable weather of the next few months. In their over-all campaign of alternating military pressures with negotiations to undermine morale on Taiwan and attain ultimate control, we believe the Chinese Communists will seek to register some tangible gain for this "season" comparable to the conquest of Ichiang and the Tachens last year. We believe they attach considerable importance to sustaining momentum in the area. Having registered little substantive gain in the ambassadorial talks with the US, they probably feel under some compulsion to prevent any growth

- 2 -

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in international willingness to "let sleeping dogs lie", which might in time lead to the acceptance of the status quo.

3. If such peripheral islands as Wuchiu or Yinshan were lost as a result of Chinese Communist military action, it would not have the critical impact on Chinese Nationalist morale that we have estimated would result from loss of the offshore islands as a whole. However, morale would be adversely affected.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

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SHERMAN KENT  
Assistant Director  
National Estimates

- 3 -

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